

Napoleon and Risorgimento:

The Taste of Reform

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Italy in the late 18th century was a far cry from the Italy that the Romans of the 1st century would have conjured. From Venetia to Sicily the Alpine and Peninsula region the modern person thinks of when one thinks of Italy was as diverse in language and attitudes as the German states but without the centralized authority of the Holy Roman Empire. Through late antiquity and up to the 18th century Italy and its many kingdoms and duchies were essentially bit players in the smash mouth politics of their larger and wealthier neighbors whether they be Byzantines, Franks, Germans, or the great dynasties like the Valois, Hapsburgs, and Bourbons. The French Revolution and the resulting wars which took place in Northern Italy in 1796-97 imposed new boundaries and established new republics with new administrations and new laws. Napoleon would further expand and enhance the French influence in all Italy before his fall in 1815, leaving the taste of the Napoleonic civil code, abolition of feudalism, promotion by merit, and a general sense of republicanism in the mouths of the people that would be asked to accept the return to the old order with the Congress of Vienna in a post-Napoleonic Europe. Along with the bureaucratic and social changes Napoleon and the French brought to Italy there was also the spread of religious toleration that until then was almost completely alien to the people in any part of the region that contained the Holy See and the papal lands. The small taste of secularization and toleration the French brought and the Congress would take away became another seed in Italy after Napoleon that would sprout in the Risorgimento¹ process. The third legacy of the Napoleonic administration of Italy is the beginning of the idea of a unified Italy either as a republic or a kingdom. Specifically, the efforts of Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-72) and the great hero Garibaldi (1807-82) who dreamed of a united Italian republic based on the model Napoleon had made with his Cisalpine Republic established in 1797. The symbol of this republic would become the symbol of the Risorgimento, the green, white, and red flag of the united Italy we know today is from this republic which Napoleon took a large part in organizing after his first Italian Campaign. Most historians place the beginning of the story of Risorgimento with Napoleon and for good reason. Though out the story of Italian unification one will find the parallels, contrasts, and direct implications to and from the period when Revolutionary and Napoleonic rule was established in Italy. Administration, Religion, and Nationalism are the three key aspects that are to be explored when looking at Napoleon's influence on Risorgimento.

The Administration of Napoleonic Italy

Following the success of the first Italian campaign which drove Austria to accept the peace of Campo Formio, the Cisalpine, Ligurian, and Luccan Republics became officially recognized European states with governments of the French directory model. Each republic would help raise taxes for the French army, have 5 directors (some selected by Napoleon), 2 legislative houses, the abolition of feudalism, tithes, and primogeniture; the confiscation of Church lands; the institution of civil matrimony; and the declaration of equality of men and women.² Imposing these changes was by no means easy for the French liaisons, and the armies left to carry them out. The new system was attacked on both sides by Italian Jacobins and old regime reactionaries in all parts of Italy, even the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies; the new system was further hampered by Austria's military campaigns in Lombardy in 1799 while Napoleon was on his Egyptian adventure. In fact much of the territory of the republics Napoleon had established fell back into Austrian hands or to counter-revolutionaries. After the treaty of

¹ The term for the period from 1815-61 (71?) that historians refer to as the process of Italian unification.

² Spencer M. di Scala, *Italy: From Revolution to Republic 1700 to the Present* 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 25.

Lunéville in 1801, Napoleon went to work to resurrect the republican structure of Northern Italy and by 1802 created the Italian Republic in the North with the First Consul (Bonaparte) as president and an Italian unification sympathizer from Milan, Francesco Melzi d'Eril (1753-1816) as vice-president, in Napoleon's absence he was essentially the governor of the new republic.

At this point it is important to realize that Italy was as the Melchiorre Gioia puts it "the patrimony of foreigners who, under the pretext of protecting us, have consistently violated our rights, and while giving us flags and fine-sounding names, have made themselves masters of our estate."³ The pretext of spreading revolutionary ideas with the French army was bunk by 1802 and all of Italy, excluding the island of Sicily which was still under Bourbon control, was land used for French and Austrian tax and manpower extraction.⁴ For this reason it was important to Napoleon to make the Italian states French friendly by making their governments similar to the French style. It would be a misapprehension to believe that Napoleon was imposing the French system on Italy for its own good.

In 1805, the administration of Italy would change again, this time the Kingdom of Italy was established by the Emperor and Napoleon took the step from president to king and named his son-in-law Eugène de Beauharnais (1781-1824) viceroy. Eugène, Joseph Bonaparte (1768-1844), and later Joachim Murat (1767-1815) would bring their own brand of reform to Italy. Owen Connolly described the changes to the constitution of the Kingdom of Italy under the de facto rule of Eugène as: "that of a republic, modified by constitutional statutes promulgated by Napoleon with the advice of a *consulta* of state comprising eight prominent citizens. Beneath him (the viceroy) was the ministry, a legislative council (council of state) which drafted laws for presentation to the legislative corps (parliament)."⁵ Joseph and Murat would also try to implement the new administrative and legal codes in Naples, a kingdom that was thought to be much more backward than the northern parts of Italy. Though some gains were made to modernize the law codes and fiscal administration of Naples, the advances of the North in all categories including agriculture and the plight of the poor far outshined anything that Joseph and Murat could achieve in the south.⁶

In 1815, despite the efforts of Eugène to hold onto his kingdom, and Murat's misguided plan to lead an army for Italian unification, Italy was forcefully brought back into the fold of the old regime by the Congress of Vienna. Many administrators that had risen by merit were now replaced by hereditary nobles and nearly all of the reforms were repealed. This "Restoration" period is considered the birth of the Risorgimento because of the start of revolutionary leaders and groups who wanted to keep some of the reforms Napoleon had brought to Italy. Ironically, these individuals and groups formed to resist the French occupation but with the return of the old regimes in Italy, they wished to hold onto some of the rights and privileges they enjoyed under the French.⁷ Groups like the Carboneria and the Adelfia and republicans like Giuseppe Mazzini and Filippo Buonarrotti (1761-1837) were a driving force in the history of Risorgimento and for a

³ Melchiorre Gioia, "From *The Italian problem in 1796, as seen by Melchiorre Gioia*," in *The Making of Italy, 1796-1870* ed. Denis Mack Smith (New York: Walker & Co., 1968), 15.

⁴ Frederick C. Schneid., "Kings, Clients and Satellites in the Napoleonic Imperium," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 4 (2008): 598.

⁵ Owen Connolly, *Napoleon's Satellite Kingdoms* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 40.

⁶ di Scala, *Italy: From Revolution to Republic*, 32-33.

⁷ Lucy Riall, *Risorgimento: The History of Italy from Napoleon to Nation State* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 13.

short time realized their dreams in 1849 when Mazzini arrived in Rome and proclaimed a republic that was to spread across Italy with reforms based on those of Napoleon and the French Revolution.⁸ Unfortunately for the republican cause, French (Napoleon III, the nephew of the Bonaparte) and Austrian pressure caused the republic to quickly dissolve and it was left to the moderate liberal monarchs Carlo Alberto (1798-1849) and his son Victor Emmanuel II (1820-1878) the Kings of Piedmont-Sardinia⁹ and their official the Count of Cavour to spread the Napoleonic administrative model through expansion of their kingdom.¹⁰ With the help of Garibaldi and Cavour, Piedmont-Sardinia ultimately was able to stand up to Austria and France and unite Italy not as a French styled republic, but a kingdom with a Napoleonic flavor.

Napoleon's Influence on Religion in Italy

It has been well established that Napoleon's views toward religion were Machiavellian at best. The way in which he plead to the Muslims in Egypt proclaiming the French to be the friends of Islam shows that religion was just another tool of politics rather than anything to be revered. Although the clash of religious fundamentalisms was more famously witnessed in the struggle with Spain, the Italian Peninsula and its inhabitants for the most part were strong adherents to the Roman Catholic Church. Rome is the seat of the pope after all and Italy also has a strong tradition of being intolerant of non-Catholics. Therefore when the French asserted their domination over Italy from 1796 to 1815 there were grumblings from the Catholic faithful. Priests and Bishops openly protested the omission of anti-Semitic prayers and in general worked to defy the Concordat of 1801's official toleration of Jews and Protestants.¹¹ In 1808, Napoleon issued the Imperial Catechism in an attempt to bridge the gap between himself and his Catholic subjects. This particular question and answer makes a good example for Napoleon's use or abuse of religious themes to appeal to the Catholics:

Q: Are there particular reasons that should attach us even more closely to Napoleon I, our Emperor?

A: Yes, because it is he whom God chose in difficult circumstances to reestablish and protect the public worship of the holy religion of our fathers. He restored and maintained public order by his profound and active wisdom; he defends the State with his powerful arm; he became the Lord's anointed by the consecration he received from the Sovereign Pontiff, head of the Universal Church.¹²

Like the administrative system Napoleon and the French had brought to Italy, the religious reforms were peeled back in the restoration period. The Papal States were reestablished and lands were restored to the Church that had been confiscated by the French during the occupation. Also the Jews were forced back into the ghettos, separated from regular society. The Church and the old nobility were just too eager to take up a reactionary stand against what Napoleon had left in his wake. Professor John A. Davis points to this post-Napoleonic trend as a major stumbling block towards unification because these old order hung on so stubbornly to their old regime principles and in fact increased censorship and liberal

⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁹ It is important to note that the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia was established as an independent kingdom to form a buffer zone between France and Austria in the restoration period. This autonomy was very important for the developments during the Risorgimento. Riall, *Risorgimento: The History of Italy from Napoleon to Nation State*, 10.

¹⁰ Ibid., 60.

¹¹ Michael Broers, *The Politics of Religion in Napoleonic Italy: The War against God, 1801-1814* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 79.

¹² "From *The Imperial Catechism*," in *Napoleon: Symbol for an Age*, ed. Rafe Blaufarb (Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2008), 96.

repression after the revolutions of 1848-49.¹³ Once again the echoes of Napoleon were to be represented in its most successful forms in the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia where the more liberal kings relaxed censorship and attracted the liberal exiles that were looking to undermine the power of the Church and Pope Pius IX (1792-1878).¹⁴ In 1861 the Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed by Victor Emmanuel II and the pope was made a virtual prisoner until 1870 when his French garrison was recalled by Napoleon III, only then was the capital moved from Florence to Rome and unification complete.¹⁵

Napoleon's Influence on Italian Nationalism

It is clear that there were Italians who looked at a united Italian republic even at the early stages of French intervention. In a 1796 essay contest in Milan, the economist Melchiorre Gioia wrote the winning essay with the theme that Italy could only stand on its own as a united Italy.¹⁶ The Carboneria and the Adelfia mentioned above were secret societies which strove to unite Italians to throw out the foreign influences that Gioia referred to in his essay. In fact the Carboneria was encouraged by the governments of Joseph Bonaparte and Murat in their own attempts to unite Italy. Historians even describe Murat's attempt at uniting Italy as the "First War for Italian Unity."¹⁷ This first attempt to unite Italy by Murat ultimately failed because he was unwilling to agree with the liberal constitution that the Carboneria demanded. Revolts in Naples and the subsequent repressive measures taken by Murat ended any idea of a concerted effort to unify Italy and Austria and England restored the old order.¹⁸ Besides the nationalist movements that sprouted in Italy during French domination, the Emperor Napoleon realized an idea of Italian unity when in 1805 he named himself King of Italy and in Article 4 of his *Constitutional Statutes* he declared that the crown of Italy would have to be separated at his death so that France and Italy would remain separate entities.¹⁹ Again the process of obtaining an Italian nation would occur in the long process of the Risorgimento.

It is at this point in the struggle for Italian unity that the famous characters of the Risorgimento which were mentioned above take center stage. In the face of the reactionary set of monarchs that hoped to repress the liberal legacy Napoleon had left in their domains, the secret groups that had resisted the French now resisted the old regime. It is no surprise that anti-monarchist sentiment was strongest in the areas where the French had been the longest, chiefly in the County of Nice, Duchy of Savoy, and Piedmont.²⁰ Indeed all the primary characters of the Risorgimento were from these areas: Garibaldi was from Nice, Mazzini from Genoa (now part of Piedmont-Sardinia), and Cavour was from the capital of Piedmont-Sardinia, Turin. The French had left behind a legacy that was picked up upon by "Jacobin-Patriotic intellectuals" in

¹³ John A. Davis, "From *Politics of Censorship in Italy from Napoleon to Restoration*," in *Napoleon's Legacy: Problems of Government in Restoration Europe*, ed. David Laven and Lucy Riall (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 253.

¹⁴ Riall, *Risorgimento*, 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁶ Melchiorre Gioia, "From *The Italian problem in 1796, as seen by Melchiorre Gioia*," in *The Making of Italy, 1796-1870*, ed. Denis Mack Smith (New York: Walker & Co., 1968), 13-15.

¹⁷ di Scala, *Italy: From Revolution to Republic*, 34-40. And Connolly, *Napoleon's Satellite Kingdoms*, 313-333.

¹⁸ di Scala, *Italy: From Revolution to Republic*, 37.

¹⁹ Napoleon Bonaparte, "From *Constitutional Statutes*," in *The Making of Italy, 1796-1870* ed. Denis Mack Smith (New York: Walker & Co., 1968), 17.

²⁰ Michael Broers, "From *The Restoration in Piedmont-Sardinia, 1814-1848: Variations on Reaction*," in *Napoleon's Legacy: Problems of Government in Restoration Europe*, ed. David Laven and Lucy Riall (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 152.

these areas the old regime powers did their best to repress or ignore these undercurrents.²¹ The result was a series of failed rebellions between 1821 and 1830. The blame for the failure of these liberal revolutions lay mostly on the separate groups' inability to form any kind of concerted effort across Italy, and instead choosing smaller goals like cities or small territories which could be easily defended by the old regime powers which included Austria in Lombardy and Venetia. The brutal repression of these rebellions inspired many Italians to rethink the approach to Italian unity. Among those inspired by seeing the crushed patriots returning to Genoa after being defeated by the Austrians in the failed revolutions, a young Giuseppe Mazzini wrote:

That day (when he saw the survivors) was the first in which a confused idea presented itself to my mind— I will not say of country or of liberty— but an idea that we Italians could and therefore ought to struggle for the liberty of our country! And my own natural aspirations toward liberty were fostered by constantly hearing my father and the friend already mentioned (Andrea Gambini, a republican sympathizer) speak of the recent republican era in France; by the study of the works of Livy and Tacitus, which my Latin master had given me to translate; and by certain old French newspapers which I discovered half hidden behind my father's medical books.²²

Mazzini secretly started circulating pamphlets urging for the liberal groups to push for a unified Italian republic and in 1831 the movement known as "Young Italy" was founded. Mazzini argued that "it became the duty of the young to overthrow the systematic repression in Europe, which blocked the moral education of the people and the progress willed by God."²³

By contrast to Mazzini, Garibaldi was considered "the personification of action over thought."²⁴ In 1840 with the help of Mazzini's illegal press network, Giuseppe Garibaldi, an exile in Uruguay was made into an Italian national hero.²⁵ In 1848 amidst the European wide revolutions and a war between Austria and Piedmont-Sardinia (which had French support at the time) in addition to the propaganda avalanche Mazzini had provide, Garibaldi burst on to the Italian scene by defending the brief republic in Rome and then supporting Daniele Manin's (1804-1857) resistance to the Austrians in Venetia.²⁶ The personality cult of Garibaldi was capped off by leading the *Mille* or the Thousand in 1860. At this point Piedmont, in large part thanks to Cavour, had consolidated much of northern Italy under Victor Emmanuel II but did not include the Papal and Bourbon lands to the south.²⁷ The expedition of the Thousand was carried out on Garibaldi's initiative and the goal was to bring these southern lands into the fold even though Cavour and Piedmont had no intention on including the less developed south in their plans. It also could prove disastrous to Piedmont's diplomatic relationship with France.²⁸ The expedition from Genoa to Sicily with a thousand irregular "redshirts" gained strength as patriots joined the struggle against the Bourbons. The successes of Garibaldi, who was encouraged by

²¹ di Scala, *Italy: From Revolution to Republic*, 52.

²² Giuseppe Mazzini, "From Mazzini's recollection of how he became an Italian patriot," in *The Making of Italy, 1796-1870*, ed. Denis Mack Smith (New York: Walker & Co., 1968), 42-43.

²³ di Scala, *Italy: From Revolution to Republic*, 65.

²⁴ John A. Davis, "From *Politics of Censorship in Italy from Napoleon to Restoration*," in *Napoleon's Legacy: Problems of Government in Restoration Europe*, 237.

²⁵ Riall, *Risorgimento*, 135. Mazzini himself was in exile in London at this time.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

²⁷ di Scala, *Italy: From Revolution to Republic*, 110.

²⁸ Denis Mack Smith "From *Garibaldi Conquers Naples and Sicily, 1860*," in *The Making of Italy, 1796-1870*, ed. Denis Mack Smith (New York: Walker & Co., 1968), 307-08.

Victor Emmanuel II, nudged Cavour into approving annexation of Sicily and Naples and cleared the way for the Piedmont army to occupy Rome and Venetia.²⁹ The seeds of nationalism that were planted during the Napoleonic period in Italy were brought to full realization by Garibaldi, a man that had hoped for a republican government similar to Mazzini's Napoleonic model, but realized that a unified Italy was only realistically possible under a liberal monarchy.

Conclusion

Napoleon's vision of a unified Italy under his direct male line was never realized. The truth is, what was realized was a united Italy that once again threw aside feudalism and allowed religious toleration, but fell short of Mazzini and Garibaldi's desires for a true republic for their nation. They had hoped for a republic like Napoleon's Cisalpine Republic that practiced limited male suffrage and allowed for a representative government. Even though not all of Napoleon's reforms were realized in the new kingdom, the larger and more important goal which was born during the French domination of the peninsula was realized. No longer was Italy the pawn of the greater powers, Italy was a nation at last with a high language from the Tuscan dialect which made was made possible with the help of novelist and poets like Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873) and Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837).³⁰ The new kingdom benefited much from Napoleon and the French by tearing down the divisions that had kept language and commercial markets separated in pre-Napoleonic years. When referring to the different reforms of the French and how they affected Italy, Lucy Riall writes "their impact on the development of an idea and myth of Italy was decisive."³¹ It is clear that Napoleon and the French through a period of less than 20 years helped open a Pandora's Box of nationalism in Italy that led to the long and bloody process of unification that is now known as the Risorgimento.

²⁹ di Scala, *Italy: From Revolution to Republic*, 112-113.

³⁰ Ibid., 49-50.

³¹ Riall, *Risorgimento*, 6.

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